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SUBJECT: LEBANESE MAN SENTENCED TO THREE-YEAR PRISON TERM  
FOR BLASPHEMY

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(SBU) KEY POINTS  
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-- (SBU) Doha's Criminal Court sentenced a Lebanese expatriate to three years imprisonment for blasphemy.

-- (SBU) Details of the blasphemy were not reported. But, under Qatari criminal law, it is unlawful for anyone to "insult Allah in letter and spirit, in writing, drawing, gesturing, or in any other way."

-- (SBU) Doha attorney Hany Waneef told Poloff Caudill on February 9 that this case will be subject to an automatic appeal.

-- (SBU) He stated that the three year sentence will almost certainly be reduced, but that the defendant will likely serve jail time and be deported.

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(SBU) COMMENTS  
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(SBU) -- This case is a typical example of the Qatari justice system at work. Defendants accused of committing offenses such as blasphemy, adultery, and drunkenness are often sentenced to stiff penalties if found guilty at the trial level. This allows the government to pay homage to Islamic law, while exercising mercy at the appellate level.

End Key Points and Comments.

1.(SBU) On February 8, the Criminal Court in Doha sentenced a Lebanese expatriate to three years imprisonment and deportation for making a blasphemous statement. The man made the offensive statement in a tirade against a subordinate at this workplace. It was overheard by several co-workers, two of whom testified against the man at trial.

2.(SBU) Under Qatari criminal law, is unlawful for anyone to "insult Allah in letter and spirit, in writing, drawing, gesturing, or in any other way." Possible penalties range from one to seven years, with non-citizens facing deportation after serving their sentences. Criminal Court clerk and translator Walid Rana told Poloff Caudill on February 8 that while Muslims and non-Muslims are charged under the same statute, Muslims are frequently sentenced to harsher sentences than non-Muslims. Older judges, who are more likely to have been educated in the stricter forms of Islamic law, are more likely to be harsher with Muslims in such cases, Rana observed. He said that a sentence of three years was in the high range for this particular example of blasphemy.

3.(SBU) Doha attorney Hany Waneef told Poloff Caudill on February 8 that this case will be subject to an automatic appeal, and

that the sentence would likely be reduced at that level. He noted, however, that since the offender was a Muslim, the defendant was likely to serve some time in prison, and would certainly be deported upon his release.

LeBaron